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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of regional/rural placements for student teachers. A secondary purpose was to discern attitude change among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and principals involved in the program. An evaluation was also made of the effectiveness of secondments, personnel employed to coordinate the program and supervise field experiences. Results of a questionnaire submitted to program participants brought to light both positive and negative aspects of the effort. These aspects are discussed with suggestions for change and improvement. (JD)

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE

THE EXTENDED PRACTICUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE: AN EVALUATION 1978-1979

REVISED SUMMARY

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Report presented to
The Department of Advanced Education and Manpower
Edmonton, Alberta
Revised December 3, 1979

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INTRODUCTION

In February, 1977, the three Faculties of Education in Alberta, in conjunction with the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Trustees' Association, submitted a proposal to the Government outlining the need for special funding to make quantitative and qualitative improvements in the field experience components of their teacher education programs.

In granting the special funding for a four-year period, the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower recommended that each university, because of the distinct nature of its practicum programs, submit a separate proposal outlining the nature of the evaluation to be conducted for its purposes. Each university was to give attention to the following areas:

1. the regional placement of students,
2. the number of students participating in full-day experiences,
3. the proportion of individuals who are on extended, continuous field experiences,
4. greater guidance provided to cooperating teachers,
5. the supervision provided by faculty consultants,
6. the range of practicum experiences,
7. the extent and improvement of the nature of involvement by faculty, school personnel and students in planning practicum experiences,
8. the nature and extension of the link between education theory and the new practicum experiences, and
9. the impact of additional time in schools on teaching performance.

The essential elements of the extended practicum were already in operation at The University of Lethbridge when the special funding became available. Therefore, the Faculty of Education elected to concentrate its efforts on the regional placement of students, the increased use of secondments, and greater guidance for cooperating teachers. These three major areas were also selected for evaluation during the 1978-79 academic year.

To evaluate the regional placement of students, an opinionnaire was administered. The evaluation of the use of secondments and of the preparation of teacher associates was mainly descriptive, but was enhanced by the findings of the opinionnaire. This report presents both descriptive and statistical findings.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The major purpose of this study was to evaluate the use of regional Southern Alberta schools as placements for practicum experience for candidates in The University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education teacher education program.

A secondary purpose of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of deploying secondments from local school systems to coordinate the regional field experience as well as to supervise student teachers in schools.

An incidental purpose of the study, addressed only indirectly in the research project but examined descriptively, was the evaluation of the secondments and of teacher associate preparation activities. It was not the intent of this study to examine Objectives 8 and 9 (see Page 1). These objectives will be examined in other studies.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this project were to determine:

1. the adequacy of the regional portion of the teacher education program as perceived by students, teacher associates, and principals (1, 2, 3, 6)*,
2. change in student attitude towards the desirability of a teaching position in a rural school (1),
3. desirability of various types of living and commuting arrangements for regional placements (1),
4. adequacy of consultation and supervision of student teachers by teacher associates and supervising faculty members, including secondments (5, 7),
5. the need for preparation of teacher associates and the adequacy of clinical supervision as preparation for teacher associates, especially in rural areas (4), and
6. the effect of student teachers on the pupils, staff, and administration in the school (1, 2, 3).

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Definition of Terms:

Ed 2500 - Orientation Practicum

- the first school experience for university students wishing to be admitted to the Faculty of Education. Students receive 60 hours of experience in the schools. Twenty-five to forty per cent of these students do not enter the Faculty of Education.

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*Numbers in brackets are cross-referenced to the list of nine objectives specified by the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower on Page 1.

Professional Semester I

- the first field experience after admittance to the Faculty of Education: six weeks full-time (2 x 3 weeks) school experience plus professional education courses during the balance of the semester.

Professional Semester II

- commonly called "student teaching". Students receive nine weeks full-time student teaching experience plus professional education courses during the balance of the semester.

Regional/Rural Schools

- all schools outside the Lethbridge city limits, excluding Coaldale but including those in the City of Medicine Hat. The term regional will be used interchangeably with regional/rural, except where the context specifically refers only to the rural areas.

Methodology

Five questionnaires were developed; one each for students entering and completing each of Professional Semesters I and II, as well as one each for teacher associates and principals involved with the Professional Semester II students. These instruments were modifications and extensions of questionnaires developed for the Rural Placement Expansion Pilot Project conducted during the fall semester of 1977.

Two forms of analysis were used for analyzing the data. Weighted means and/or frequencies were used when only the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction was to be measured. This technique was also

used on occasion when a comparison between groups was desired. Cross-tabulation was used to examine relationships between variables, and Chi-Square tests significant at the ninety-five per cent level of confidence are reported when they are considered germane to this study.

Sample

The sample for this study consists of 143 students who entered the Faculty of Education and registered for Professional Semester I in the fall of 1978 (N=85) and the spring of 1979 (N=58). Of the 85 students who were in Professional Semester I in the fall of 1978, the 57 who had had rural placements were also assessed in Professional Semester II; the students who were in Professional Semester I in the spring of 1979 did not enter Professional Semester II in time for this study. The response rate for those in Professional Semester I was high (see Table 1), but only 63% of the Professional Semester II students responded. Three-quarters of the students responding were females and 71% of all the students were unmarried. Approximately equal numbers had received their elementary and junior high school education in city and in rural schools.

Questionnaires were also sent to 114 teacher associates and to the 62 principals involved with the student teachers in regional schools during Professional Semester II. A total of 58 teacher associates (50.8%) and 33 principals (53.2%) responded. Over seventy-five per cent of the principals and eighty per cent of the teacher associates were working in an elementary or a combination elementary/junior high school. The average teaching experience of teacher associates in rural schools was 11.9 years. Nine of these

teachers had had experience in city schools. Thirty-four of the teacher associates had had previous experience as teacher associates.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RESPONDING TO QUESTIONNAIRES

Sample		Fall 1978 Sent	Fall 1978 Ret'd	Spring 1979 Sent	Spring 1979 Ret'd	Total Sent	Total Ret'd
Pre-Professional Semester I	n	85	84	58	57	143	141
	%		98.8		98.3		98.6
Post Professional Semester I	n	85	84	58*	48	143	132
	%		98.8		82.7		92.3
Post Professional Semester II	n			57	36	57	36
	%				63.2		

*These students will not enter Professional Semester II until fall, 1979.

DISCUSSION

This section contains a summary of the findings of the study. Some comments on the effectiveness of secondments and the teacher associate preparation programs are included as well as a brief statement about the faculty's attempt to integrate theory and practice in the teacher preparation program. These sections are followed by questions and implications which have arisen from the Faculty of Education Extended Practicum Program and future plans for research and evaluation.

Findings of the Study Summarized by Objective

The major purpose of this study was to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of the regional/rural placements. A secondary purpose was to discern attitude changes among student teachers, teacher associates and principals who were involved in the program. It must be remembered that the data represent only the first group of students to complete the program during the study. However, the design of the study and the questionnaires utilized appear to have been appropriate, and with some modifications, should be applicable to a continuation of this study. The findings related to each objective of this study will be discussed in their order of presentation.

Objective 1: Adequacy of the rural portion of the teacher education program as perceived by students, teacher associates, and principals.

All student teachers had at least one rural placement during the course of the practica. On this basis, they compared the urban and rural portion of the program. Student teachers indicated that city

schools had more adequate resources than rural schools. This observation may indicate a need to develop a wider variety of adaptive skills in student teachers (self-reliance, creativity) for teaching in rural schools. On all other criteria, the student teacher satisfaction, interaction, and learning seemed greatly enhanced in rural placements.

Student teachers were asked in open-ended questions to state the most positive and negative aspects of their Professional Semester II placements. They rated their relations with staff and students in regional schools positively. Transportation arrangements and lack of materials were cited as negative aspects of the rural placement.

Student teachers in urban areas were of mixed opinions. Some rated communication with teacher associates and staff positively while others felt there was a decided lack of communication. Student teachers were also split in regard to pupil attitude; some reported that it was a very positive aspect of their placement and others reported that it was a very negative aspect. However, student teachers were in agreement that the availability of materials and resources was a positive aspect of urban schools.

Perhaps the differences in the student teachers' perceptions of their experiences in urban and rural schools may be related in part to the novelty of placing student teachers in rural areas. Teacher associates in city schools have had a great number of student teachers and possibly have higher expectations. It is also possible that urban teacher associates may have become less excited about the idea of having student teachers.

Objective 2: Change in student teachers' attitude towards the desirability of a teaching position in a rural school.

Prior to having had teaching experience in rural schools, student teachers indicated a preference for urban placements. Following the extended practicum, this view was altered so much that student teachers indicated that they would prefer to teach in rural Southern Alberta than in Lethbridge or other cities. In addition, student teachers indicated that the rural experience had a positive effect on their attitude toward a rural teaching career. In fact, all of them would even recommend a rural placement to their friends.

Objective 3: Desirability of various types of living and commuting arrangements for rural placements.

The Extended Practicum Program seems to offer the variety necessary for student teachers to deal effectively with the rural practicum situation. Some students preferred to live in, while others had a definite preference for commuting. Factors influencing their decisions seemed to be finances, transportation arrangements, and family. Although the teacher associates and principals generally agreed that residence made no difference, some teacher associates suggested that a "live-in" arrangement might have overcome some of the problems they had encountered with consultation time with student teachers. When students must rush to meet their car pool, this can only act to counter an informative exchange during the consultation time.

Objective 4: Adequacy of consultation and supervision of student teachers by teacher associates and supervising faculty.

Students in rural areas felt that they had had less contact with

their University consultants than did their urban counterparts. However, approximately ninety per cent of the student teachers in the practica in both rural and urban placements consulted with University faculty a minimum of once a week. The teacher associates who felt they had more frequent contact with the University faculty indicated a higher satisfaction with the program in general.

Student teachers reported consultations at least once a day with their teacher associates; these occurred mainly before and after school hours. It appears that teacher associates in rural schools are more willing to give their student teachers greater responsibility and more opportunities to test their teaching skills in the classroom.

Objective 5: Need for preparation of teacher associates and adequacy of the clinical supervision workshops as preparation for teacher associates.

More than one-quarter of the 58 teacher associates involved in this study had participated in the clinical supervision workshops provided by The University of Lethbridge faculty. Efforts were made to place students with teacher associates who had this training. However, this was not possible in many cases. Teacher associates were asked to rate their involvement in the tasks of the teacher associate. The five activities ranking highest focused on observation of the student teachers, teaching and helping the student teachers, and giving feedback to the University consultant. All but one of the teacher associates who had participated in workshops considered them to be very useful. No analysis was attempted to differentiate between the teacher associates who participated in workshops and those who did not.

Objective 6: Effect of the student teachers on the pupils, staff, and administration in the school.

The general effect of the student teachers on schools, staff, and pupils was beneficial. Teacher associates and principals reported that the presence of student teachers in schools was valuable. Most recommended that student teachers be placed in their schools once a semester or at least once a year.

Effectiveness of Secondments

No formal evaluation to determine the effectiveness of secondments has been carried out to date. Groundwork has been laid, however, to make this a priority item in the next year or so (the Lethbridge Regional Subcommittee on Field Experiences has asked for and is willing to cooperate in a study of this type). Notwithstanding this lack of formal evaluation, the effect of hiring three and one-half secondments in the last two years can be described.

First, it is doubtful whether the regional/rural expansion on which we have embarked in the last two years would have been possible without the coordinating and supervising help of the secondments. The faculty simply does not have sufficient personnel to organize and supervise field experiences in many different Southern Alberta centres.

Second, although the graduated sequence of practica was in place before the announcement of extended practicum funds at The University of Lethbridge, desirable supervision models have been developed only in the last few years. Here, too, secondments have made a very important contribution by allowing for the implementation of a rigorous supervision model in the three practica.

In addition, secondments have shared in the responsibility and successes of increased and more effective communication between the Faculty of Education and Southern Alberta schools. Informal feedback has shown that teacher associates and principals give secondments high credibility because of their proven practical ability in the classroom.

The clinical supervision workshops, too, have benefitted from the help of secondments. More workshops in Southern Alberta centres have been offered because secondments have been involved in assisting the workshop leaders.

Finally, a letter received from one school superintendent indicates a very positive attitude on the part of school districts toward the practicum program.

As already indicated, The University of Lethbridge plans to assess the contributions and value of secondments in a more formal manner in the next year or two. The information will be presented in the next two evaluation reports.

Effectiveness of Teacher Associate Preparation

The purpose of the Clinical Supervision/Analysis of Teaching Workshop is to help teacher associates improve their supervisory skills. The expectation is not necessarily that they will supervise more, but rather that they supervise in a manner designed to enhance the student teacher's professional growth.

Over the past four years, 242 cooperating teachers have taken the workshop; 81 from the City of Lethbridge, 28 from the City of Medicine Hat, 128 rural teachers, and 5 undergraduate students. (Table 2.)

One of the main objectives for these workshops is to develop a supervisory style that promotes behavior change in the student teacher through a process of internalizing the need for change rather than through compliance. Change which is effected through a process of compliance is not likely to be permanent over time.

The workshop focuses on interpersonal relations skills and skills related to using the clinical supervision cycle (pre-observation conference, observation and data collection, analysis of the data, and techniques of conducting a successful most-observation conference). Participants in the workshop also analyze their own supervisory conferences using videotapes and a system designed to categorize supervisor-teacher interaction.[1]

An attempt has been made to have participants in the workshop act as a teacher associate for a student teacher whenever possible. This has been the practice for the last two years and has proven most successful.

Response to the workshop by teacher associates has been very positive. Incidental feedback has indicated that participants feel it has provided them with knowledge and skills which assisted them in establishing a good supervisory relationship. Exercises related to objective data collection and providing feedback in a non-threatening mode are seen as particularly useful. Knowledge and insights gained through the use of Flanders Interaction Analysis are also

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[1]Thorlacius, Jon. The Supervisor-Teacher Analogous Categories System: A System for Analyzing Supervisor-Teacher Supervisory Conferences, 1978.

TABLE 2

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS IN CLINICAL SUPERVISION WORKSHOPS

CENTER SEMESTER - YEAR	TOTAL ENROLLMENTS	CITY-LETHBRIDGE	COUNTY-LETHBRIDGE	CARDSTON	MAGRATH	COUNTY-WARNER	RAYMOND	STIRLING	FORT MACLEOD	CLARESHOLM	PINCHER CREEK	TABER	VAUXHALL	COUNTY-FORTY MILE	BOW ISLAND	BURDETT	MEDICINE HAT	COUNTY OF VULCAN	OTHER
Campus Summer '75	20		2	2	1	3	5		1			6							
Campus Fall '75	28	27												1					
Campus Spring '76	27	15	1	8			1			1		1							
Campus Summer '76	13	6							1	1		4	1						
Campus Summer '77	23	14	1						4	2		1							1 - Penhold
Raymond Fall '77	22				6	2	9	3											2 - students
Foremost Fall '77	20													11	9				
Campus Spring '78	20	8	1	4					1		3	1							2 - students
Campus Summer '78	14	4	2			2			1			1				1	2		1 - Brooks
Taber Fall '78	18											15	3						
Campus Spring '79	9	7	1			1													
Medicine Hat Spring '79	27															27			
TOTALS	241	81	8	14	7	8	15	3	8	4	3	29	4	12	9	28	2	6	

seen as most helpful in providing participants with some basic tools for analyzing classroom verbal interaction.

Research presently being conducted by University of Lethbridge faculty members indicates some statistically significant changes in supervisory behavior as a result of workshop training.[2] Evidence based on the analysis of videotapes indicates that after training, supervisors made greater use of factual information rather than subjective judgement. Additionally, there is a much greater emphasis placed on eliciting judgements from student teachers based on objective reporting of performance rather than on supervisors telling student teachers what should or should not be done. There is also evidence of increased collegiality between supervisor and supervisee, rather than the superordinate-subordinate relationship which tends to exist prior to training.

The Link Between Theory and Practice

Although evaluation of the link between theory and practice has been beyond the scope of this particular research project, a link between the two has been established within the present functioning of the program. The direct implementation of the theoretical constructs in the classroom has been an integral part of The University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education teacher education program from the onset, and can be observed most clearly in the professional semesters.

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[2]Thorlacius, Jon. An Analysis of Changes in Supervisor Behavior as a Result of Training in Clinical Supervision. Research in progress. The University of Lethbridge, 1978.

Professional Semesters I and II, for example, present the student with a complete package of course offerings and practical experiences. The students are evaluated by their teacher associates and professors on the practical application of theory in the classroom setting.

From the very beginning, the guiding idea behind Professional Semester I was the integration of theory and practice. Professional Semester I students are involved in five on-campus modules in addition to the six-week practicum. The students' application of the theory taught in the modules is evaluated directly in the practicum. For example, the theory behind the item on the evaluation form, "write appropriate objectives for lessons" is taught in the Curriculum and Instruction module. The item on the form "observe classroom interactions: learner-learner, learner-teacher" evaluates the application of theory discussed in the Interaction Laboratory. Another item "select and develop resource materials for instruction" relates to material presented in the Media module.

Similarly in Professional Semester II, methods taught in class have direct application to the practicum. In another component of Professional Semester II, students are given the theory of evaluating pupil learning. Student teachers apply their knowledge during the practicum by completing a project in which they apply the principles taught in the module to evaluate their pupil's learning in the classroom.

Many more examples could be cited to demonstrate the link between theory and practice. The actual evaluation of the nature of such a link in the teacher education program is in itself a major study.

Plans to evaluate in depth the link between theory and practice are now being considered.

Implications for Future Evaluation

From the evidence gathered to date on the extended practicum, it is apparent that all parties/persons involved in the program (students, teacher associates and faculty) are relatively content with the nature of the field experiences, the relative lengths of the practica, the types of placements, and the nature and extent of the supervision. However, it is also apparent that many questions remain unanswered. In particular, some aspects of the program have been identified as requiring rigorous evaluation in the near future. Some of these major considerations are as follows:

1. Further evaluation of the regional placements.
    a. Should regional placements be a compulsory component in every student's extended practicum program?
    b. Should students be financially supported in full or in part in their regional placements?
    c. Do regional placements require a compromised supervision model?
2. Teacher associate preparation.
    a. How appropriate are current supervision models?
    b. Do practicum students benefit more from teacher associates who have had clinical workshop training?
    c. Should workshops be mandatory for teacher associates who are or will be supervising student teachers?
    d. What is the best method of compensating teacher associates for supervision of practicum students?

3. Effectiveness of secondments.
   a. How can secondments best be utilized?
   b. Is the hiring of secondments an effective use of extended practicum funds?
   c. How does the hiring of secondments benefit the university and the school system?
4. Integration of theory and practice.
   a. Is there a consistent attempt to integrate theory and practice in the teacher education program?
   b. How is this integration manifested in the program?
   c. How effective is this integration?
5. Effectiveness of the teacher education program.
   a. Are the teachers from The University of Lethbridge program prepared for initial teaching assignments?
   b. Do the teaching graduates of The University of Lethbridge continue to develop professionally?

Many of these questions are being addressed either directly or indirectly in studies within the QAULTEP[3] umbrella. A bibliography of some of the more relevant studies is included in Appendix A.

Although the faculty is pleased with the current status of the extended practicum, it is also committed to making any changes which will lead to improvement in the program. Therefore, funds have been allocated to conduct research in the above areas. We anticipate that some of these areas will be discussed in the 1980 and 1981 reports.

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[3]QAULTEP is an acronym for Qualitative Analysis of The University of Lethbridge Teacher Education Program.

APPENDIX A

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